

Partnership in Education Riverdale Presentation June 9, 2005

Introduction

- I'd like to first thank Carmen Queen Hines for inviting me to represent our Minnesota Program at today's get-together as well as for all the help she's given our people in Minnesota over the past four years. I'd also like to go back in history to when we started the Program in Minnesota and thank Michelle Weddle for all her help.
- It was indeed five years ago this summer that Jose Gallagher, Donna Wilson, and I piloted the newly announced Partnership in Education Program in our Minneapolis Office.
- What I'd like to do today, during my brief presentation, is give you a quick history about our Minnesota Program, tell you a few stories, let you know where we are now, where we're going, and see if you have any questions. So without further ado...

History

- It was five years ago that Pam Lyons, who was then the Training Officer and a member of the Management Team, asked me if I would be interested in helping set up the Partnership in Education in Minnesota. I always like to be involved in at least one volunteer activity... this seemed like a win-win situation, and so I said yes!
- By doing some initial checking, I found out that one of my workmates, Donna Wilson, had two daughters who were attending the Downtown Open School in Minneapolis. This unique elementary school is located on the Skyway so anyone interested in participating from our Office would not have to venture out into the Minnesota cold... and for those of you that have never been to Minnesota in the winter... it can get unbelievably cold!
- In addition to a very diverse student body, the School had a long history of working with volunteers, and had a great reputation. The student body was especially diverse and on the one hand, then Mayor Sharon Sales Belton's children attended while on the other hand, there were a number of children living in homeless shelters.
- So after discussing the matter with Donna, and making contact with Jose Gallagher who had been volunteering at a Spanish Speaking School in South Minneapolis, the three of us decided to approach the Downtown Open School to

see if they would be interested in having U.S.D.A. volunteers work with their School.

- That's how it started... and for the past five years, we've had approximately a dozen APHIS volunteers each year participate in the Partnership in Education. Our volunteers include both young and older employees, those new to APHIS and those that have been with APHIS for more than twenty five years, employees on all of our major teams and a significant number of Management Team members.
- For the first four years, the majority of our people volunteered at the Downtown Open School. Unfortunately, because of funding issues and the fact that the Open School had to lease commercial space in downtown Minneapolis, the School District closed the Downtown Open School. Even though we set up a similar partnership with the Interdistrict Downtown School (which is Kindergarten through High School) so far most of our volunteers have switched to suburban schools.
- In a nutshell, that's our history.

Some Good Stories

Now it's time for a few stories. There are many great stories I could tell you today, and I've chosen four of my favorites to give you an idea of how meaningful the volunteering has been both to the school children and to our APHIS staff.

- One of our newer employees (totally new to the Federal Government) who is also one of our older employees is Kay and she had a very touching experience with William. After seeing this Third Grade student for a number of weeks, William asked her if he could pretend that Kay was his Grandmother. She looked at him strangely and he explained that his "real" Grandmother yelled at him a lot but Kay was so very nice and kind to him. When Kay told this story at our volunteer meeting, everyone was touched.
- Eric's Aquarium – One of our newer Federal employees accompanied me on an initial tour of the Downtown Open School and asked the Principal about the gigantic empty aquariums. She explained that a volunteer from Target used to keep the aquarium full of insects, hamsters, centipedes, and lizards; however since he stopped coming, no one had followed up and the animals were given away to individual students. Eric decided to make this his volunteer activity and many weeks, he went over to the School two or three times to take care of the animals and meet with small groups of kids to talk about each of the aquarium's inhabitants. In addition, despite my plea not to spend his own money. He was so touched by the kids' interest that he actually bought a bunch of new animals for the aquariums.
- Jose's Martial Arts – One of our three co-founders, Jose Gallagher, has had some very unique experiences in teaching martial arts to students in Minneapolis.

Please look at the Handout that I distributed for a description of Jose's experience in his own words. In addition, the Handout has descriptions that both Donna and I wrote about our first year experiences.

- Liz – One of our employees was volunteering at her child's school in suburban Minneapolis and saw an article about Best Buy Corporation giving money to help K through 12 schools. She did some research, made some contacts, and wrote a grant that led Best Buy to fund the School's Computer Lab for \$6,000. Liz asked me to mention that Best Buy does this nationwide for public and private schools, and if you go to the "Community Relations" section of Best Buy's website, you'll find information on how to apply.

Marketing

I'd like to take a minute to mention that one of the reasons for the large number of volunteers in Minnesota is that we send emails and post notices that try to touch peoples' hearts. I've put one copy over at the table for you to look at. The Subject of the email is: "Help Some Kids... and Get Admin Leave." In addition, we offer "No Obligation" tours to the downtown schools so people who are a little 'gun shy' about going 'Back to School' have a very low key opportunity to see a school first hand.

Meetings

One other thing we do in Minnesota is have twice yearly "Half Hour Get Togethers" where we share experiences and answer people's questions about volunteering. These very informal meetings give us the opportunity to talk about experiences at our Twin Cities schools and discuss any administrative issues that come up. Indeed, one year, Jose told the story of one child who misbehaved so much that he, Jose, had to lift him up and carry him from the room. Even if people are not currently interested, we invite them because "it's a good opportunity to learn about possibilities for next year.

Where We're Going

We're looking forward to our fifth year of the Partnership in Education and having more volunteers than ever next year!

Any Questions